

She was preparing to figure skate for Olympic gold. Little did she know that a loose plan was being hatched to bash her knee so hard that her broken leg would keep her out of competition. The details show it wasn't much more than a jealous teammate, her ex-husband, and a friend putting this plan together. These weren't mastermind criminals, nowhere near pros. They weren't good liars either. Their plan was carried out, but the figure skater's leg didn't break. They didn't cover their tracks. The police found out who it was fairly easily. Such poor planning got Tonya Harding caught, her ex-husband put in jail, and Nancy Kerrigan recovered in time to win silver at the Olympics the following month.

Twenty years ago tomorrow, before reality TV and scandals there was Nancy versus Tonya. This weird story at first was tragic and ultimately turned to make Tonya look foolish and bumbling. Her simple, mistake filled plan lacked real thought. It wouldn't be something you or I would ever come up with. Speaking of plans I would never come up with, the plan God outlines in the Bible is also one such plan. Starting with events at Christmas it is all way too much for me to imagine, plan, much less carry out. The corresponding life of Jesus has details I wouldn't ever dream up. And to think God put all of it together for me and you.

Yet God didn't want us left in the dark regarding ourselves or what he did. He always intended to reveal his plan. Not in every full and complete detail, but enough that we would be able to understand and believe it. In the second lesson Paul writes in a letter to the Ephesians to give us some of those details to believe. We discover we were...

**Predestined for praise**

**Chosen in Christ**

**Redeemed in Christ**

**Sealed in Christ**

A group of potential players waits against the wall as the captains look them over. They're all good. Any of them could be chosen first. The captain with the first picks shouts a name. All the other players' shoulders slump because they weren't picked first. Does it mean they aren't good? No, it simply means there's only one first pick and someone had to be chosen first. Many people view the Bible's doctrine on election the same way. God is choosing teams and some get selected because they're better and others don't get picked at all. It seems unfair to many. It seems heartless and uncaring. How come God chooses some and others he leaves behind? Doesn't God love all people? Even if you've never thought about the doctrine by name before, you've probably asked yourself similar questions.

Before creation God knew what was coming. There would be a world filled with people God intended to be perfect. But all of them would be separated from him because of sin. He didn't make the sin happen; he simply knew it would happen. He also never intended for these humans to be separate from him. With no way to get themselves back, God would do something. God put together a great plan no one else could. **"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."** Out of the large mass of humanity God chose the elect. He chose people who were not already holy and blameless, but he chose them to be holy and blameless. He did this choosing **"in him"** it says. That 'him' is Christ Jesus. In Christ God chose the elect. He chose them in Christ.

Now your first question is probably how do I know I'm one of those chosen? Or maybe it's what about those who weren't chosen? What happens to them? And what if I am one of them? What about fairness? Why would God do something so cold and heartless? Stop yourself from asking the questions. These questions only pull you away from the only way God wants you thinking about election. Anytime you think about the choosing of the elect by God it must, it must be done with focus clearly on God's grace in Christ.

Before you even think any more about election, look at the Word made Flesh in the manger. God revealed to you what you would never have known otherwise. No secrets, no keeping you in the dark. In Christ he is open and honest. **"In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves."** God is revealing the plan here. He's revealing this as his pleasure to do for you. In love he chose you and me. In Christ he chose you and never separate from him. He chose you not because of what he saw in you, but because of what he saw his Son Jesus would do for you. Everything that might possibly stand in the way of you being saved is overcome in Christ. God chose you in Christ, that little baby born in a manger and revealed to you as the Word of God made flesh.

Simply talking about eating wouldn't do you any good unless your eating has content. You need a food to actually eat. That food is what's important. So also there would be no election except for the content of and the reason for election. This promised Savior is the most important part of God's amazing plan revealed to us. In Christ the Savior God was redeeming humanity.

When people have questions about election it almost never fails they ask about the small island somewhere out there that hasn't heard about God. What about that unnamed group of people who live in some unnamed place so remote they haven't heard about God or Jesus or the Bible? What will God do about them? He can't hold them accountable or judge them worthy of hell. It wouldn't be fair because they didn't know about Jesus. If you've had thoughts about that same group and how unfair God seems to be let me ask you one question. What makes you so different from them? Are you thinking it's unfair because you seem to have been privileged or lucky to be born on the right continent in the right year? Or is it that you really deep down figure it wasn't random? Maybe you think God was right in choosing you because in fact deep down you believe you aren't as bad as some. You try. You have faith. Maybe God saw ahead that you would have faith or that you wouldn't be that bad and so he could choose you.

Not true. None of it is true. God owes no one anything. He doesn't owe you mercy, love, even fairness. He doesn't owe anyone those things. God has every right to judge you as he does the unnamed person on some unnamed island. You have sinned. Don't believe me? Read through God's commandments. Really examine how you're doing in life. God's expectation is perfection. Not almost good. Not kinda good. Not getting there. Perfection. You can't achieve that and I can't either. No one can. And each of your sins demands a huge payment to redeem you. It'll cost your life.

But God did the unthinkable. God himself redeemed you and paid the price. Instead of exacting the payment of life from you and me he took it from his Son Jesus. **"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding."** The little baby of Christmas was born to grow up and shed his blood for you and me. Don't ever forget that important part of the Christmas story. It took the lavish riches of God and his grace to make the payment. But God was willing to do it for you and me. And at just the right time according to God's wise plan Christ came. At just the right time according to God's wise plan Christ died and rose again. Christ shed his blood, God poured out his grace, and we were redeemed in Christ. We can live in the certain hope and assurance that our sins are paid for and done with.

When the bank loans you money to buy that dream house they expect you'll pay it back. To get it guaranteed they take a down payment. That's your good faith gesture that you intend to pay the rest back over time. God has given humanity a good faith gesture of better things to come. **"You were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possessions."** The Holy Spirit is God's down payment with the promise more is coming. God has promised and God's promises are sure. The Holy Spirit guarantees it by dwelling in you.

You can know that everything is going according to God's plan. Nothing is outside of his control and nothing abnormal is happening that God didn't account for and take into consideration. **"In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will."** In Christ, God set up the plan to bring us to faith. Nothing deters from that plan. Nothing knocks God off that plan. And God makes the message that through Christ we are saved and we can believe it known. **"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation."** You and I have the gospel promises in God's Word. It's right there, the truth, the gospel, your salvation in Christ.

When Paul wrote this he started with his intention. **"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."** Praise for the baby born in Bethlehem at Christmas. Praise for the plan God put into motion before the world was created and you or I were ever born. Praise for his grace, for his adopting us as his children, for the inheritance that is ours and will completely be ours someday. Praise him because he chose us, he redeemed us, and he sealed us. He is worthy of our praise because all of this was done in Christ.